New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1956

Volume XVII, Number 15 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of October 15, 1956

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"Too Late the Phalarope"

DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

October 12, 1956

'Too Late the Phalarope' Tragic In Intent but Lacking in Impact

By JOHN CHAPMAN

All the many elements of "Too Late the Phalarope" are admirable and not a few of them are distinguished; but at its first performance at the Belasco Theatre last evening it failed to maintain command of my emotions and carry them along to the inevitable tragic ending.

Somewhere among the many scenes I lost the play, although I continued admiring the way it was set, staged and performed. The ending, splendidly acted by an ancient Scottish gentleman named Finlay Currie, should have left me shaken in mind and spirit, but it didn't.

I think I lost the play because I couldn't go along with the central figure emotionally. The drama failed to persuade me that the physical coldness of a young Afrikaander policeman's wife could drive him to dalliance with a native girl and thus into disgrace. If love had been involved in this fateful crossing of the color line my reaction might have been different—but there was no love in this miscegenation on the part of either party.

Fragmentary Work

Hence I did not care much—and my caring was essential for this tragedy, or for any tragedy.

"Too Late the Phalarope" has been adapted from a novel by Alan Paton by Robert Yale Libott. It is, with its many scenes and emotional transitions, a collection of fragments rather than an integrated drama building steadily toward a strong conclusion—but many of the scenes are excellent theatre.

Barry Sullivan plays the police lieutenant with reticence and good judgment. He is stationed in the Transvaal in South Africa. Although he and his wife have a small boy, the wife remains a distant creature. When she takes the boy away for a holiday, the affection-hungry lieutenant chances upon a lissome native girl who satisfies some but not all of his yearning.

Splendid Production

When the wife at last awakens to complete love of her husband, it is too late. His relation with the dusky girl has become known, and in South Africa this means complete ostracism. His father nails shut the door of the family home against him and he is lost. Where will he go? The play does not say—but another man in the same awful predicament has killed himself.

The production of "Too Late the Phalarope" is splendid. There is some extraordinarily interesting between-scenes music by Josef Marais, and the settings themselves, designed by George Jenkins, are splendidly atmospheric and remarkably well lighted.

There is an appealing performance by Ellen Holly as the native girl, and the large cast includes such other good performers as Ann Dere, Paul Mann and Alan Napier. Currie's performance as Sullivan's hard-minded old father is by far the best . . . but essentially "Too Late the Phalarope" is an illustration of the enormous difficulty of translating a novel into a play.

"TOO LATE THE PHALAROPE"

Play by Robert Yale Libott, based on the novel by Alan Paton; staged by John Stix; settings and lighting by George Jenkins; costumes by Dorothy Jeakins; music composed and supervised by Josef Marais; presented by Mary K. Frank at the Belasco Theatre, October 11, 1956. The cast:

Lt. Pieter Van Vlaanderen.....
Barry Sullivan
Stephanie.....Ellen Holly
Dick Vorster.....Geoffrey Horne
Jakob Van Vlaanderen.....
Finlay Currie
Nella Van Vlaanderen.....
Laurinda Barrett
Frikkie Van Vlaanderen.....
Patrick Dewar; Roy Barba, alternate
Tante Sophie.....Ann Dere
Isak.....Cherokee Thornton
Sergeant Steyn.....George Tyne
Esther.....Estelle Hemsley
Herman Geyer....Byron Russell
Japie Grobler.....Paul Mann
Anna Van Aardt...Janine Manatis
Veronica Massingham.....
Bronia Stefan
Dominee Stander.....Grant Code
Capt. Massingham...Alan Napier
Matthew Kaplan (Kappie)....
Joseph Boley
Johannes Maartens....Kurt Cerf
Capt. Jooste.....Ralph Sumpter
Native Policeman..Roy Thompson

New York Post

October 12, 1956

By Richard Watts, Jr.

Drama of South Africa's Race Laws

Once "Too Late the Phalarope," Robert Yale Libott's dramatization of the Alan Paton novel, has approached its tragic climax in the third act, it is moving, powerful and inexorable. But at the Belasco Theater last night, where it had its first performance, it took so long to achieve its sad and bitter spell, despite Barry Sullivan's altogether admirable portrayal of the leading role, that it dissipated its force considerably. It ends in the spirit of authentic tragedy, but I'm afraid that its rather dawdling first two acts keep it from exerting its proper impact.

Its two final scenes, however, are so good that it becomes a play which certainly no one can dismiss easily or forget readily in its truth and its ironic bitterness. The savage and sardonic manner in which the sensitive and decent young South African police officer is trapped in the brutal sex segregation laws of his unhappy country then captures a compelling dramatic forcefulness which is so disturbing in its reality that it comes very close to atoning for the early languors. But it does take an unfortunately long time to get down to business.

Danger of Fidelity

The weakness, which comes dangerously close to being fatal, appears to arise in great part from the playwright's determination to stick too faithfully to the novel from which his work is taken. Nor is this necessarily a criticism of the book that the brilliant and gallant Mr. Paton wrote. It is just that the forms of the novel and the drama are so different, and that scenes, characters and various incidental matters which can be so effective in the former can hopelessly entangle the impact of the latter. I fear Mr. Libott is too literal in his adaptation.

Nevertheless, the story that he has to tell is inescapably moving. Although he is sympathetic to the Negroes in his district, the young police officer is firm in his enforcement of the laws against sexual relations between the races. But, driven by loneliness and his wife's cold narrowness, he has an affair with a handsome and unhappy native girl, and he knows he is doomed. It is, he is aware, only a matter of time before his dereliction is made known, and, when it is, he is deserted in his moment of need by both the wife and his stern old biblical father.

The Symbol

It is assuredly a rather noble fault of a dramatist to follow his source with too much fidelity, but a fault it is. There is, for one thing, that matter of the phalarope, which is a rare South African bird. As I recall it, the symbolism wasn't too clear in the novel, and, in the play, it simply gets in the way of the dramatic narrative. I suspect it would have been a good idea if Mr. Libott had set out to write his own play based on Mr. Paton's story, instead of trying to get too much of the book into his dramatization literally. It might then have had the needed directness.

As the young policeman, Mr. Sullivan plays with a simplicity, force and integrity that are immensely effective, and Finlay Currie, as the grim, pious and dreadful father, is impressive in his stern dignity. The native girl is sympathetically and honestly played by Ellen Holly, and Laurinda Barrett as the wife, Ann Dere as a compassionate aunt, and Alan Napier as the policeman's sympathetic superior officer are just as they should be. And George Jenkins's sets capture the proper atmosphere. My fear is, though, that the play just misses as a really fine tragedy.

The New York Times

October 12, 1956

Theatre: Race Relations

'Phalarope' Is Staged at the Belasco

By BROOKS ATKINSON

TOWARD the end of "Too Late the Phalarope," which opened at the Belasco last evening, Robert Yale Libott gets to the heart of his story.

A young police officer in the Southeast Transvaal in South Africa has violated the moral code of the land by having sexual relations with a Negro girl. The consequences are terrible. He is expelled from society. His father, a patriarchal Afrikaner, closes the house against him and goes into retirement with the front door nailed shut. For the unspeakable crime against God and race has been committed and the disgrace falls permanently on every generation in the family.

•

As played by Finlay Currie, a venerable actor with apostolic magnificence, and Barry Sullivan, a taut young actor of strength and directness, the concluding episode in the narrative conveys the tension, fanaticism and tragedy of life in South Africa today. It also conveys the moral earnestness of Alan Paton, author of the novel from which Mr. Libott has drawn the play.

Since "Too Late the Phalarope" has an epochal theme, it would be pleasant to report that the whole work lived up to the level of the concluding episodes. But the sheer abundance of the problems diffuses the play. Mr. Libott has taken in too much territory. He and John Stix, the director, have tried to encompass a whole nation—at least two race problems, political, social, religious, even psychiatric problems; native chants sung—and sung beautifully—as background music; innumerable scene changes to represent innumerable details in the story.

•

In the acting and in the settings there is a lot of beauty in "Too Late the Phalarope." George Jenkins has caught vivid sections of African life in his well lighted scenery; and Dorothy Jeakins has costumed it well. Ellen Holly as the smiling, sensuous Negro girl; Laurinda Barrett as the priggish wife; Alan Napier, Geoffrey Horne and George Tyne as members of the provincial police; Paul Mann as a humorous and tender-hearted welfare officer and Ann Dere as a maternal aunt—all bring bits of this diffuse play to life and communicate various aspects of the staggering problems involved.

•

But it is the function of the dramatist not so much to state problems as to penetrate into the souls of human beings. As a craftsman, Mr. Libott has not touched on the human problems until in the last few scenes he plunges boldly into the relationship of a young white police officer and a Negro girl.

Then "Too Late the Phalarope" comes into focus and lays hold of the emotions of the audience as well as the theme of the play. Mr. Currie's ferocious righteousness and Mr. Sullivan's desolation bring it alive. Everyone concerned has managed to put a fine conclusion to a rambling, over-produced drama.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

October 12, 1956

The Broken Law, The Bolted Door

By TOM DONNELLY.

"Too Late the Phalarope" (at the Belasco) is the first new play of the season with any serious pretensions to dramatic quality. It has been produced with elaborate, conscientious care, and I regret very much that the end result is all smoke and no fire.

The drama has been adapted by Robert Yale Libott from Alan Paton's novel about a young police lieutenant who is destroyed by his sudden passion for a native girl. Here is that rare occasion when one can't say that the subtleties of the printed page have been lost in the simple, bright glare of the stage.

Mr. Paton's earlier effort, "Cry, the Beloved Country," is a moving and distinguished work of fiction. His "Too Late the Phalarope" has something to offer in the way of poetically observed South African backgrounds, but it is essentially a melodramatic fable peopled almost exclusively by cardboard characters. The graver faults of the play stem from the source.

Social Truths.

I am willing to accept at the start that "Too Late the Phalarope" accurately mirrors the social truths of South Africa. It is a criminal offense, then, for a white man to have anything to do with a black girl. Any Afrikander, as the Dutch pioneers and their descendants are called, who violates the "Immorality Act" is not let off with a worldly wink or silent disapproval. He is imprisoned, ostracized and hounded, sometimes to the grave.

Lt. Pieter van Vlaanderen is afflicted with a wife who has chills and tremors whenever he mentions the word "love," since she imagines that he is using the term in its exclusively carnal sense, and with a father who is living proof that a man can turn himself into an unapproachable granite image if he really works at it.

The lieutenant is thereupon driven to his brief illicit escapade, he is found out, and the play ends as he is carted off to jail, his ears ringing with the sounds of wife and parent boarding up the house against him.

Rebellion at Injustice.

Drama may rise readily out of rebellion at injustice, or out of love recklessly achieved, or out of conflict sympathetically expressed. "Too Late the Phalarope" bows to none of these theatrically desirable conventions. The lieutenant is said to be "for the black nation," but no evidence is presented to show that he, for a moment, questions the barbarous laws it is his job to enforce, or that he regards the native girl as a human being. His protracted anguish is as unlovely and as unmoving as the plight of an ambitious socialite detected in a lapse of etiquette by Emily Post.

Few of the play's vital points are persuasively made. The wife expressed herself early in the proceedings with the traditional complaint to the effect that her mate should not embrace her in front of the servants or muss her dress. Later on, when she has warmed up a trifle, her husband's cry of "I worship you!" is a tribute that seems mysterious in the extreme.

The hero's father is that inflexible figure out of a hundred one-dimensional dramas. The patriarch who has spent a lifetime reading the Bible without ever having noticed any of the passages pointing in the direction of Christian charity. His ultimate decline represents a falling off from no height at all.

Barry Sullivan interprets the role of the tight-lipped lieutenant to the extent the role allows.

Finlay Currie is an actor of great warmth and charm, but his assets are frozen in the role of the father. The supporting company is generally a good one, and Ellen Holly is wonderfully appealing as the native girl. Miss Holly is at once sly, sensuous and helplessly corrupt. It is her good fortune, of course, to have been entrusted with the only acting assignment that is in both human and dramatic focus.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
October 12, 1956

THEATER

'Too Late the Phalarope'

By WALTER KERR

IF "TOO LATE THE PHALAROPE" ends with the sting of a whip, it is because dramatist Robert Yale Libott, actor Barry Sullivan, and director John Stix have had the infinite and cunning patience to treat every gesture, every silence, every sudden slashing word along the way with quiet, confident, superb honesty.

Over and over again in a crowded yet strangely compact evening this trio has gently but firmly found the precise nuance, the odd meaningful glance, the suspended and unspoken terror that will make Alan Paton's remote and highly specialized novel leap into intimate and immediate stage life.

• • •

"Too Late the Phalarope" is bound round by the racial prides and the monolithic conventions of the South African Transvaal, where the Afrikanders tear from their family Bibles the names of those who have touched native women, where the more understanding British are—after a hundred years' residence—still regarded as aliens, where the natives themselves are not above fabricating revenge out of the very prejudices that oppress them. The snakelike coil of the story throws one young police officer into the psychological labyrinth of three savagely crossed traditions; since the traditions themselves are distant and the codes formidably rigid, it can have been no easy task to tease both the scene and the struggle into warm, sharp focus.

Yet to watch Barry Sullivan dismiss an erring young man with curt, almost merciless sympathy is to understand at once the passions that are at war within him. Mr. Sullivan is called upon for any number of normally 'theatrical' postures: letting his hands go to his face in horror as a curtain falls, crumpling on a balustrade as his world crashes around him, fashioning a rough noose as he describes a scorpion-hunt and seeing to it that the noose foreshadows his own future. Each of these bold outlines is so simply drawn, and so completely filled out of the actor's inner anguish, that belief becomes compulsive and absolute. We'll be lucky to see as sound and as sensitive a performance again this season.

• • •

And director John Stix has drawn the same taut ring around his group scenes. The muted tension when an expelled member of this society comes apprehensively into a tobacco-shop, the suspenseful silence of a birthday party as a seventy-five-year-old patriarch opens a gift from his estranged son—these are brief vignettes which create vivid meaning out of little more than a hush. Mr. Stix has, in addition, commanded wonderfully secure performances from Finlay Currie as a father whose love is lost in bigotry, from Ellen Holly as a genuinely tempting temptress, from Laurinda Barrett as a wife with a chill on her soul, and from Alan Napier, Ann Dere, Geoffrey Horne and Paul Mann.

• • •

Mr. Libott's spare dramatization may, it is true, be a bit too spare on occasion. He has included a great many fragmentary scenes that might easily have been telescoped; and in his pursuit of plausibility he inches his second-act so painstakingly toward its goal that we long to race ahead of him. But there is a dramatic intelligence at work here that distills a crisp, clear intensity out of every passing mood, and the language can rise from the shadowy innuendo of the earlier scenes to a rousing declaration of moral independence before the last crackling curtain has come down.

Against George Jenkins' stunning contrast of a jungle maze and a shadowy church spire, one of the play's victims looks at the dark sky overhead and describes heat lightning as "all electricity and no tears." "Too Late the Phalarope" does not indulge itself in tears. It is content to discharge a sizzling electrical storm.

Journal American
October 12, 1956

Lavish Production Builds Up Suspense

By JOHN McCLAIN

TO BEGIN WITH, the Phalarope is a bird and, according to my large Webster, it is a peculiar type bird because the courtship is pressed by the female. So I am a little bewildered by the title "Too Late the Phalarope," an adaptation by Yale Libott of Alan Paton's fine novel of the same name, which was presented at the Belasco Theatre last night. For in both the book and the play it seemed to me the Phalarope got there a little on the early side, if anything.

This literal and lavish interpretation of the novel, involving almost a dozen sets, a large cast, an unseen chorus and orchestra, is concerned with the problem of miscegenation in South Africa. A brilliant young police officer, the hero of the local rugby team, finds himself temporarily separated from his wife and succumbs to the blandishments of a native girl of highly irregular morals.

Most of the evening is devoted to his struggle with this monstrous secret, his eventual exposure, and the far-reaching effects of his crime on the community and his stern Dutch-African father.

The story itself is highly episodic, and the producers have spared no pains in bringing the interiors and exteriors of the Transvaal to the stage. Much of the early portions of the play are thus devoted to setting the pattern and establishing the many characters, in building the background which makes the copper's weak moment a particularly devastating one.

From a purely theatrical point of view some of this exposition drags, but when the action finally shifts into high gear it moves with speed and suspense. Barry Sullivan, as the police lieutenant, gives one of his most thoughtful and consistently powerful performances.

Currie Brilliant

Finlay Currie, that towering old gentleman cast as the father, gives a brilliant delineation of the dour, unbending patriarch; Alan Napier is the precise and meticulous senior officer; Paul Mann is an unctuous social service worker; Ellen Holly is suitably seductive as the native trollop and George Tyne is excellent as Sgt. Styn, the heavy of the piece.

There are some good scenes—the one in which the sergeant breaks the unwritten law of turning in a white man guilty of a morals offense; another in which the young officer is confronted by the overwhelming evidence brought to bear against him.

In the last analysis I'm afraid the engrossing moments in the evening come, like the Phalarope, too late.

Daily Mirror

October 12, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Phalarope' Is Less Moving Than Novel

• But play has worthy point to make and all elements for good, stirring drama.

Alan Paton penned a novel called "Too Late the Phalarope," a protest against the stern code of the Boers, who ostracize those of their number guilty of miscegenation. In an effort to protect their stock, they have become fanatically Puritanical, and, according to Paton, fail to temper justice with mercy.

Robert Yale Libott, successful film and airwaves scripter, adapted the book for the stage. And Mary K. Frank brought the resulting play to the Belasco Theatre Thursday evening. It has a worthy point to make, and it has all the elements for good, stirring drama—drama bordering on tragedy.

YET IT FAILED to move us as it should. We found it difficult to believe that a young police lieutenant, with a fine war and sports record, could have been unfaithful to his wife—even though his rather cold wife took a three-weeks vacation. As Libott has etched his background, it just seemed a bit incredible to us.

Many years ago a melodrama titled "White Cargo" coined a fortune for its producers. It showed the effects of the tropics on weak Colonials, and it emphasized sex. Somehow, "Too Late the Phalarope," though certainly a more honest and earnest work, is not calculated to duplicate that financial success.

The Phalarope, in case you'd like to know, is a migratory bird, usually found along the South African coast. The allusion in the title is to the young officer's wife, who discovers too late that she really loves her husband. And she didn't really love him in the end, for, like his father, she turned her back on him.

GEORGE JENKINS has designed spectacular, atmospheric settings. And producer Frank has given director John Stix a large and capable cast with which to interpret the newcomer.

Barry Sullivan plays the young lieutenant with evident sincerity. Finlay Currie, making his Broadway bow at the age of 78, is excellent as the dour Boer father. And there are noteworthy contributions by Alan Napier, Paul Mann, Ann Dere, Laurinda Barrett, Ellen Holly, Geoffrey Horne, George Tyne and Janine Manatis.

There is a reference in the text to heat lightning accompanied by thunder, but offering little release. It seems to sum up "Too Late the Phalarope." There are occasional flashes of lightning, distant rumbles of thunder, but the dramatic storm never breaks.

"The Reluctant Debutante"

The New York Times

October 11, 1956

Theatre: Comedy Made in England

'Reluctant Debutante' at Henry Miller's

Light Drawing-Room Play Is Pleasant

By BROOKS ATKINSON

HAVING nothing to say, William Douglas Home has said it very amusingly in "The Reluctant Debutante," which was put on at Henry Miller's last evening. His actors speak it very amusingly, too.

For in both respects "The Reluctant Debutante" is in the tradition of the British drawing-room comedy in which light material can carry quite a substantial weight of entertainment. Let's not rank Mr. Home with Coward, Maugham and Lonsdale, authors of comedies that are taut as well as amusing. Although Mr. Home is always in good humor, he makes his way from point to point in a rather ambling fashion.

•

But after the sort of theatre Broadway has given us this month, it is refreshing to encounter the gabbling drawing-room in which a busy-body mother tries to marry her daughter to a good catch, but finds herself pleasantly frustrated. Mrs. Broadbent is alarmed because Jane does not seem to be interested in the young men she meets at formal parties. Jane is especially uninterested in the young gentleman whom every mother of a negotiable daughter is trying to bring to heel.

But Jane does fall headlong in love with the one young man whose reputation for philandering is a scandal. No point in going into details: "The Reluctant Debutante" is not a thesis drama, but a theatre piece. As a theatre writer, Mr. Home has a nice relish for the inconsequential, a droll style of writing, a proper respect for eavesdropping behind doors and mistaken telephone numbers and a winning faith in the absurdity of worldly society.

In the last act he puts a solid foundation under his prank by writing a couple of charming scenes of romance. This part of the comedy is thoroughly delightful. When something real is at stake in the plot, Mr. Home's breezy style of writing comes into its own.

Production and performance are capital. Raymond Sovey's fashionable London drawing-room shines extravagantly, and Kathryn B. Miller's costumes glow with expensive good taste. Under Cyril Ritchard's skimming direction, the performance sparkles even in the middle scenes when Mr. Home is not writing at his best.

•

Nothing makes much impression on the amiable imperturbability of Wilfrid Hyde White. As the head of a frantic household, Mr. Hyde White gives a brilliant performance in the A. E. Matthews manner — relaxed, quizzical, neat, funny. In the part of the rattle-headed mother, Adrianne Allen is crisp and alert and most enjoyable. And Anna Massey's reluctant debutante is delightful, too. Politely sulky in the early scenes when the boys annoy her, she becomes a thoroughly captivating young lady in the second act when she falls in love.

John Merivale could hardly be better as the romantic young man who is not as glib as the author but appreciates a sweet girl when he meets one. As a second scheming mother, Brenda Forbes is humorously disingenuous, and David Cole is amusing as the supercilious courtier.

Altogether a pleasant evening with an obliging author in a good mood and some first-rate comedians on the stage.

"THE RELUCTANT DEBUTANTE"

Comedy by William Douglas Home; staged by Cyril Ritchard; setting by Raymond Sovey; costumes by Kathryn B. Miller; presented by Gilbert Miller in association with Loew's, Inc., by arrangement with E. P. Clift at Henry Miller's Theatre, October 10, 1956. The cast:

Jimmy Broadbent.....Wilfrid Hyde White
Sheila Broadbent..Adrianne Allen
Jane.....Anna Massey
Mabel Crosswaithe.....Brenda Forbes
Clarissa.....Christina Gillespie
David Bulloch.....David Cole
David Hoylake-Johnston.....John Merivale
Mrs. Edgar.....Renee Gadd

DAILY NEWS

October 11, 1956

'Reluctant Debutante' Charming Parlor Comedy, Pleasantly Acted

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Charming" is the adjective for the London comedy hit, "The Reluctant Debutante," which Gilbert Miller presented at his father's theatre last evening.

Charming, enjoyable and really quite funny in a dry, witty fashion — and most engagingly acted by a company whose principal asset is Wilfrid Hyde White, a slender, sardonic old Briton who can make almost any line amusing simply by ignoring it and throwing it away.

The plot of this play by William Douglas Home is even more slender than Mr. White, and certainly older. But, like the actor, it carries itself jauntily. Its sole concern is a mother who has a debutante daughter who wants to unload this child on society and upon some faultless and feckless young man as soon as possible.

Mama Goes a-Hunting

Since there is no huntress like a mother when it comes to stalking marriageable and eligible game, it is fun to watch Adrianne Allen as she prowls through the London telephone books in quest of a trophy whom she can bestow on her debutante daughter, Anna Massey. It also is fun to watch Miss Massey's normal and natural reaction—for Miss Massey, like all girls, has a firm idea of whom she wants and the hell with Mother.

When Mother, shocked that her only child has become interested in a wrongo, expostulates, "He's a philanderer," her wide-eyed baby says, "I thought that was someone who collects stamps." Father takes all this man-hunting with patient good humor, and he makes it sound almost like a compliment when he opines that mothers with eligible daughters are "a lot of refined white-slave traffickers."

Pleasant Humor

All through, this company at Henry Miller's Theatre is a good one, and it has been very pleasantly directed by Cyril Ritchard. Miss Allen is delightful in the role of the female parent—a flutter-headed character who could easily be overplayed or wrongly played. Miss Allen manages just the right touches of madness and maternal determination.

Miss Massey, also, manages the right touches as a nice young girl who insists upon falling in love with the right man in spite of all her mother's help. John Merivale is just the right kind of man such a girl should fall in love with, and there are some other amusing performances by Brenda Forbes, Christina Gillespie and David Cole.

"The Reluctant Debutante" is not a comedy which will make you fall out of your chair laughing. Its humor is quieter — and very pleasant.

Journal-American

October 11, 1956

New Comedy Simply Ripping

By JOHN McCLAIN

IT HAS BEEN so long since I've spent an evening in the theatre with bright, attractive and semi-normal people that I may have become somewhat carried away with the charm and humor of "The Reluctant Debutante" which opened at Henry Miller's Theatre last night.

For I thought it was simply delightful.

Although deeply rooted in British idiom and manner, this new comedy by William Douglas Home has a sense of the ridiculous which exceeds all boundaries; it has great style, good taste, is beautifully mounted, and is performed by a cast which, for the most part, transmits a contagious feeling of ease, confidence, and a blithe conviction that their nonsense will be shared by the audience.

Last night's customers went with them all the way.

The author displays a brittle knowledge of the current mores of the English social structure.

Annual Rat-Race

His theme involves the annual rat-race in which mothers of the season's debutantes outmaneuver each other in a desperate effort to land suitably select noblemen for their daughters' hands, and he approaches his task with ribald understanding.

Jane, the particular prize on the auction block, is being steered into the eager arms of a young guardsman, but through a convenient confusion in phone numbers she winds up with an extremely attractive clubman with few of the apparent qualifications for chic matrimony.

The plot is no more complicated than that.

But this does not do justice to the utterly engaging portraits of the principal characters. It has been a long time since we have been privileged to see as droll and disarming a father as the one created here by Wilfrid Hyde White; and as the harried and determined mother Adrienne Allen comes through with off-beat warmth and humor; Anna Massey, as the girl, has the wonderfully languid speech and behavior of the London "deb," the wide-eyed approach to life's weightier problems. John Merivale is the perfect young sophisticate.

Some slight reservations must be made in the structure of the play when it slows up for a scene between Clarissa, a rival deb, and David Bulloch, the young guardsman. These are slightly overdrawn characters, even in America, and the squeaky voice affected by the young lady seemed hardly worth the effort.

Some Slapstick

There are other moments rather self-consciously slapstick that may be excused by the fa that, however implausible, th are well delivered.

Brenda Forbes, playing th part of Clarissa's fiendis mother, overcomes a rather static part with her fine sense of comedy.

There were those who thought "Reluctant Debutante" might be one of those British imports that would suffer by being brought across the Atlantic. I, for one, think it will prosper.

Daily Mirror

October 11, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Reluctant Debutante' A Smart, Smash Hit

• English drawing-room comedy is witty, wise and winning.

For a few minutes after the curtain rose on "The Reluctant Debutante," at Henry Miller's Theatre Wednesday evening, we thought George and Margaret might have returned for another visit. For those fabulous characters have become symbolic of light-headed Britishers, completely incomprehensible to Americans.

But it didn't take long for us to come to the conclusion that Jimmy and Sheila Broadbent were no George and Margaret. On better acquaintance, they became good friends. We found them delightfully understandable and quite charming. Just the sort of people with whom to spend an entertaining evening.

JIMMY BROADBENT was a sensible chap, and a patient one, too. When Sheila became a bit flighty in her efforts to land a suitable husband for her debutante daughter, he took it in his stride. Being civilized and something of a philosopher, he knew that everything would come out all right in the end. And so it did.

For daughter Jane, following her heart, proved more clever than her mother. She knew a cad when she met one, even though he owned a country estate and belonged to the right regiment. And she was quite capable of recognizing the real thing when it came along. Mater's machinations to the contrary, she found a Duke whom she could love.

Let's face it, it takes the English to bring off this sort of drawing-room comedy. They are past masters at keeping a bubble shimmering in air for a couple of acts. They have the manner for evening clothes and Mayfair chatter. Chatter that can become cumulatively hilarious in adroit hands.

Under Cyril Ritchard's deft direction, a sparkling cast succeeded in convulsing a distinquished first-night audience with William Douglas Home's observations on scheming mothers, independent daughters and understanding fathers. And producer Gilbert Miller has commissioned Raymond Sovey to provide a tasteful Eaton Square living room, and Kathryn B. Miller costumes for ladies and gentlemen.

• • •

ADRIANNE ALLEN merits an exquisite bouquet for her portrait of the well-meaning, but not very bright, match-making mother. Wilfrid Hyde White is simply wonderful as the urbane and intelligent father who puts his faith in his offspring. Anna Massey, daughter of Miss Allen and Raymond Massey, is captivating as the teen-ager with a mind of her own.

John Merivale, Brenda Forbes, Christina Gillespie and David Cole are perfect, too, in a perfect cast.

Don't be frightened by the fact that **"The Reluctant Debutante"** is a big London hit. Though that often spells disaster over here, the new arrival is witty, wise and winning. Tremendously funny. A smart, smash hit. As smart as the knowing patrons of St. James Street.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

October 11, 1956

Comedy as Cozy As a Cucumber

By TOM DONNELLY.

There are a few incidental pleasures to be gleaned from "The Reluctant Debutante," at Henry Miller's Theater.

In one climactic passage a lady who has just called for her husband to throw a young bounder out of the drawing room demonstrates that she is not too far gone in rage and apprehension to remember her manners.

"He won't be a minute," she says to the bounder, thereby handsomely recognizing her obligation as a hostess to leave no guest, however unwelcome, suspended in the awkward vacuum of silence.

The text of William Douglas Home's comedy, which has mysteriously held the delighted audience of London for more than a year, is filmed over with an agreeable buzz of non sequiturs, and chatter about the death of peers, and gossip about the perfectly ghastly mishap of Lady Price, who fell down during a fox trot.

Good Here—Why There?

Some of this may seem amusing to us on this side of the water because we get just enough of it to feel cozy with it, but not so much that we have it running out our ears. But why are the British themselves so enraptured with these familiar refrains? There is a metaphysical question if ever I asked one.

Unhappily, all of the best lines in "The Reluctant Debutante" are those which are thrown away by the three expert farceurs of the company: Adrienne Allen and Wilfred Hyde White, as the debutante's parents, and Brenda Forbes, as a matron with a daughter of her own to push on the market.

The lines that can't be thrown away, but have to be served up in state, crush the evening under the sheer funereal weight of numbers.

'Tis Fragile Stuff.

If I may mangle the British idiom a trifle, Mr. Home's plot resembles an open-faced cucumber sandwich, constructed with a fragile slice of bread, and the merest whisper of peel. The situation is this:

Mummy doesn't want daughter to marry David Hoylake-Johnston, who is rumored to be a bit of a cad. Actually, David isn't a bit of a cad at all, but a bit of a duke, since his great-uncle has just died, bequeathing him the title. End of problem, end of play.

The principal dramatic action consists of Mummy on the phone, ringing up everybody in town, and incidentally getting several comic wrong numbers.

Also, there is a great deal of business at the breakfast table, with everyone toying with eggs and fruit and coffee pots and the London Times. No kippers, however. I gather that kippers are now considered theatrically old hat. High time, too.

A Thin Spot.

Director Cyril Ritchard has been guilty of at least one major miscalculation. Presumably acting on suggestions in the manuscript, he has encouraged two young subordinate players to strive for laughs by methods so primitive as to make the juveniles in "Junior Miss" seem like figures out of Moliere.

The girl speaks in an excruciating squeak; the boy disports himself like a reflection in one of those mirrors at the funhouse.

As the reluctant heroine, Anna Massey isn't allowed to do anything flashy, such as denouncing the debutante system, but her display of bored, boneless innocence strikes a note that is true and captivating.

New York Post

October 11, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Friendly Comedy From London

"The Reluctant Debutante" is a mild and slender little comedy, a sort of Mayfair version of one of F. Hugh Herbert's stage antics about a nice girl in pursuit of a husband. But, thanks chiefly to Cyril Ritchard's brisk direction and a wonderfully casual and delightful performance by Wilfrid Hyde White as the heroine's easy-going father, the rather placid play from London by William Douglas Home, which opened last night at Henry Miller's Theater, has a graceful charm and an agreeably humorous air of understatement that turn it into quite pleasant entertainment.

It is this Mr. White who gives the English hit its chief claim to attention and popularity. Although the charmingly effortless light comedian was seen in this country with the Oliviers in both "Caesar and Cleopatra" and "Antony and Cleopatra," he hardly attracted the interest he deserved. That comparative American neglect is sure to cease at once. Playing what could be the conventional role of the mellow and seemingly abstracted parent, who is equally amused by his daughter's quest and his wife's ambition, he offers a portrayal of such sly humor that he is irresistible.

The contribution of Mr. Ritchard's guileful staging shouldn't be neglected, either. In London, I thought "The Reluctant Debutante" had an atmosphere at once dawdling and slapdash that made it seem both lethargic and labored. Mr. Ritchard hasn't changed it violently, but he has, it seems to me, added a bit of pace here and a touch of freshness there that have transformed the spirit of Mr. Home's comedy most engagingly. It remains a fairly uneventful and lackadaisical play, but it now has an unostentatiously humorous charm that is a great deal of fun in a modest way.

Its pattern is certainly far from revolutionary. Mrs. Broadbent, who would like to find a good social catch for her daughter, is worried because the girl doesn't seem to attract the right sort of men. She wants to interest her in a silly officer of the guards, and she is upset because Jane prefers a handsome young rake of dubious reputation. But Jane has her way, with some slight aid from her tolerant father, and you aren't supposed to be overwhelmed by surprise when her dashing preference turns out to be no one less than the new Duke of Positano or something.

It is all very innocent and very amiable. The mother's pretentious snobbishness is regarded with a smile rather than a frown, and you are hardly expected to believe that the rejected suitor is any more of a deplorable rake than the suspected but innocent winner of the heroine's hand. And there is nothing uproarious about the play's comic manipulations. There isn't supposed to be. But there is that sly British air of blandness and humorous understatement, and, as a result of the acting, a modest but genuine charm that brightens the evening attractively.

Although it is Mr. White's brilliantly winning style of comedy that gives the play its most enlivening quality, the other performances are enormously helpful. Anna Massey, who created the title role in London, has a freshly humorous charm, and Adrianne Allen, who is also Miss Massey's mother in real life, makes the ambitious parent likable rather than a menace. There are excellent portrayals by John Merivale as the winning suitor and David Cole as the loser, and Brenda Forbes and Christina Gillespie are good in smaller roles. It is all disarmingly likable.

New York Herald Tribune

October 11, 1956

THEATER

'The Reluctant Debutante'

By WALTER KERR

I CAN think of three possible reasons why you might go to see "The Reluctant Debutante" at the Henry Miller. The first is that you admire genuinely brilliant light comedians. (Wilfrid Hyde White is a genuinely brilliant light comedian.) The second is that you have an uncontrollable passion for very smart decor, very sleek department, and the rippling sort of dialogue that keeps exlaiming "So that's why Brenda Barrington went off to ski in May!" The third is that you really want to see another play about the problems of getting a seventeen-year-old girl married.

• • •

William Douglas Home's comedy, which has had quite a long run in London, skates smoothly and faithfully over a very familiar ballroom floor. Matrons vie, tartly and tigerishly, for available young men to dine, dance, and perhaps dally with their daughters. Husbands spend excessive amounts of money on the coming-out process, telephones ring and are rung on the quarter-minute, a terrified mama cries "He's a philanderer!" and a wide-eyed ingenue replies "Oh, I thought that was someone who collected stamps?"

When the fat is in the fire and the principal debutante comes home much too late with her rakish swain, things happen that I hesitate to tell you about: mama is caught at the keyhole (twice) and daddy turns up with a hot-water bottle.

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You see the problem Mr. Home has posed for us. In spite of my almost fevered admiration for the delectable precision Adrianne Allen was bringing to the part of a feather-brained escort-hunter—she dials a telephone as though she were approaching a pianoforte, and she has a glorious patience with her intellectual superiors—I found myself sturdily resisting the author's suave but decidedly second-hand blandishments for a good half of the proceedings last evening.

Then the aforementioned Mr. Hyde White began to play tricks. The gentleman in question is a fastidious fellow who stands pleasantly erect, his hands at his sides, his bland and bemused face composed into the shape of a lemon-drop, and smiles genially at his own jokes. Sometimes, when the joke needs a little more help, he adds a short, bloodless, devastating cackle at the end of it. Just why this technique should work so splendidly I don't know—it's a little as though Mr. Hyde White were performer and audience rolled into one—but for quite a lot of the second act he had be doubled up, and he did it with lines about which matron at a given dance had the longest mustache and which debutante was the most nearly clean-shaven ("she must take after her father").

• • •

He does have help. Anna Massey, daughter of Raymond and the admirable Miss Allen, is a long, slender girl with the hair-do of a reddish cockatoo, enormous accusing eyes, cheeks that seem to be storing up nuts in them, and a manner that is at once confiding, businesslike, and altogether charming. John Merivale is handsome and imperturbable as a suspect suitor, Brenda Forbes—after an initial struggle with jokes on the order of "You look like Juliet at the Old Vic the night she met what's-his-name"—finally lands a few, and Cyril Ritchard's direction is good, firm meringue.

The upshot? When Miss Massey brings her swain home at 3 a. m. for a little refreshment and so forth, she asks him "Would you like a rich tea-biscuit?" The comedy at the Miller is a ready-mix tea-biscuit, made rich along the way by some exceptionally deft clowning. I'd have preferred a squarer meal, but if your taste runs to muffins you'll find this one artfully served.

"Sixth Finger in a Five Finger Glove"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

October 9, 1956

THEATER

'Sixth Finger In a Five Finger Glove'

By WALTER KERR

"SIXTH FINGER IN A FIVE FINGER GLOVE" seems to be derived in more or less equal parts from the earlier Saroyan, the Mary Chase of "Harvey," the medieval morality play and the Sears-Roebuck catalogue.

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Since it is practically impossible to take offense at so wistful a work, let us simply take inventory:

There is a setting—it's called a "Swap Shop"—that contains not only the expected assortment of tennis rackets, chess pieces and voluble cuckoo clocks, but a front door given to playing Chinese temple bells at its every opening and a hooked-up electric skillet capable of boiling buckwheat cakes. (I didn't know you boiled buckwheat cakes, but there you are!)

There is a hero, the young proprietor of the Swap Shop, who is cute, lovable, noble, whimsical, loyal, warm, kind, dependable and absolutely guaranteed to turn you against the human race forever.

There is a heroine who seems, by her accent, to be part Austrian ("This be spooky place") and part Chippewa ("I bake 'um cake like never before"). She is the youthful proprietor of what is horrendously known as a "house," she does bake a chocolate cake with strawberry icing, and she is now taking out her citizenship papers.

• • •

There are three talking photographs.

There are assorted townspeople who are very venal and need to be given a lesson in love and togetherness. ("A community grows not by what everybody pulls out of it but by what everybody puts into it.") Among these I especially noticed a fat fellow who kept perspiring, shouting things like "Oh, this is awful!" "Oh, this is terrible!" and "Oh, what next?" and who wound up working off his frustrations by furiously pedaling what the program calls a "home bicycle exerciser," thoughtlessly supplied by the Mac Levy Slenderizing Equipment company.

This character was sometimes accompanied by a Mayor who seemed to bring his gavel with him everywhere he went, and who concluded one, especially loud argument with the ringing words, "Oh, poo!"

• • •

The Mayor, in turn, was accompanied by a female secretary who, at a noisy point in the proceedings, simply stood up and screamed, immediately earning an extremely sympathetic round of applause from the audience.

Scott Michel's play, which may be the worst disaster since "Harbor Lights," further contains a basketball workout, a cha-cha dance session, an impressionistic "waiting" ballet while two psychiatrists are examined by our hero, and a daybed that folds up to music. Need I add that the bed seemed wonderfully inviting?

I may not have made everything clear. Let's just say that "Sixth Finger in a Five Finger Glove" is all thumbs.

"SIXTH FINGER IN A FIVE FINGER GLOVE"

Play by Scott Michel; staged by John Holden; setting and lighting by Paul Morrison; presented by Gertrude Caplin and Thelma Fingar at the Longacre Theatre, October 8, 1956. The cast:

Matt Holly..... Jimmie Komack
Grandfather Holly (voice)..... Wyrley Birch
Uncle Harry (voice)..... Walter Fisher
Andy Barrett..... Bill Zuckert
Erna Kuloc..... Gladys Holland
Samuel Holly (voice)..... Michael Keene
Frank Castellano..... Frank Campanella
Stu Norton..... Charles Mendick
Edgar Pinnell Jr.... Samuel Gray
Vincent Vanyard... Leopold Badia
Herb Ingersoll.. Charles Campbell
Miss Ferguson..... Salome Jens
Mayor Thomas E. Seller..... Bruce Evans
Dr. Peter Hoenig... Conrad Bain
Dr. John Evans..... Paul Huber

Journal American

October 9, 1956

Undistinguished Play Unfortunate Venture

By JOHN McCLAIN

COMING away from "Sixth Finger In A Five Finger Glove," the new play which opened at the Longacre Theatre last night, I crumpled and threw away a series of notes I had made during the early part of the proceedings. For as the evening came to its leaden conclusion it seemed unfair to shoot small holes at the tattered fabric; the whole thing is just frightening, and it would be heartless to tear it apart, thread by thread.

It can be stated in a general sense that the writing and acting lack distinction; the play is not funny or ingenious or faintly whimsical. There is not the saving grace of a performance that has apparently been stifled by poor material. One wonders, once again, by what strange hypnosis the producers were induced to bring it to town.

Confused Plot

The confused circumstances which serve as a plot involve the proprietor of a "swap shop" who discovers that he owns title to the entire town where he lives and works. This revelation of course causes a municipal crisis, with the subsequent exposure of most of the leading citizens as crooks and swindlers.

But is the proprietor of the swap shop mentally competent to own and administer a town? The psychiatrists say he is not, but for some reason the populace decides in his favor after all. The curtain goes down on a touching moment in which he has just landed the local prostitute a peachy job in the super-market.

As the eccentric storekeeper Jimmy Komack, a good capable comedian in other premises, finds himself hopelessly at loss to bring either warmth or humor to a ridiculous characterization. His shop is filled with gadgets, but the author neglected to include one that would produce either laughs or excitement at the press of a button.

Gladys Holland, as the harlot with the heart of gold, makes enormous use of a middle-European accent and is suitably decorative and demonstrative, but is equally thwarted in her efforts to gladden the evening.

Others who struggled nobly, but failed, are Bill Zuckert, Samuel Gray, Frank Campanella, Paul Huber and Charles Mendick. Charles Strouse composed some original music which deserved a better fate.

There was some thought that "Harbor Lights," which came to town last week and lasted four performances, might be known for some time as the season's most unfortunate venture. But I'm afraid "Sixth Finger" has the new title right in the palm of its Five Finger Glove.

New York Post

October 9, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Small Play With a Long Title

If many plays of the quality of "Sixth Finger in a Five Finger Glove" come along, there won't be any more of that wild talk about a shortage of theaters. It will be the shortage of theatergoers they'll have to worry over. For the comedy by Scott Michel, which opened last night at the Longacre, is a wistful and woebegone little item that is filled with mechanical gadgets but no discernible dramatic skill to equip it to face the competition of even a fairly good play.

There is, however, such a pathetic and helpless desire to please in Mr. Michel's wan offering that I find myself striving with some desperation to say something kind about it. Looking wildly in all directions for a pleasant word to utter, I have heroically come up with two things to suggest on its behalf. First, it probably isn't quite as bad as the luckless "Harbor Lights," although it requires a delicate instrument of measurement to decide the issue. Second, it is less painful than its title.

At this point, my mad generosity must cease. There is no getting around the truth that the new play, which I can't keep calling by its full name, is not only immensely dull but also sadly amateurish. It begins with a young man named Matt Holly talking to the portraits of his ancestors. What's worse, they talk back to him. He runs a little shop filled with antic electrical devices, and he lives in the back room with those garrulous ancestral pictures for company.

He also has three friends, and he's teaching them to dance. This makes for a merry little scene that is as painful as they come. He likewise makes the acquaintance of a pretty girl who turns out to be the town prostitute, and, of course, the possessor of the only real heart of gold in the vicinity. She has another talent, too. She loves to bake cakes. Will it surprise you to learn that, when his old pals turn on the kind and gentle Matt Holly, she sticks with him gallantly?

Don't think I am going to let you off without a few more plot details. The town banker is trying to force Matt to sell his property, but our hero, after a chat with the ancestors, discovers that the entire town legally belongs to him. The banker then tries to have two psychiatrists declare him insane. Not to keep you in any greater suspense than the playwright kept me, the villainous plot fails, and the three friends who deserted the young man in his moment of need are filled with remorse.

It might be just as well if the identity of the unfortunate actors trapped in these naive proceedings was veiled in anonymity, since all of them are no doubt worthy of better things. But I thought Jimmie Komack did everything possible with the role of Matt Holly, and Bill Zuckert had a moment or two as a conniving real estate man. The lucky actors, though, were the ones who were the disembodied voices of the ancestral portraits. Our hopeful new season is certainly having its troubles.

New York World-Telegram and The [illegible] Sun

October 9, 1956

An Icy Finger Down My Spine

By TOM DONNELLY.

"Harbor Lights," which opened last Thursday, racked up a stunning total of four performances and I see no reason why "Sixth Finger in a Five Finger Glove," which opened last night at the Longacre, shouldn't do at least as well.

The first thing you will want explained to you is: What does that title mean? Well, that title, which will live in infamy, refers to the hero's uncomfortable, even hopeless, position in society. Society is a glove of corruption, playwright Scott Michel says, and his hero is an appendage too decent for it. Or, to put it another way, he is a fifth wheel of rectitude on the garbage truck of Our Time.

It may not have been Mr. Michel's intention, but I am sure I am not the only theatergoer who was driven last night to reflect that Our Time isn't as bad as it is invariably painted by artists like Mr. Michel. Granted, Our Time isn't terribly symmetrical, or even very pretty, but it isn't an endless oblong gray blob. There are blue days, and golden days, and there are leaves on the trees, and you can always hear the laughter of small children at play, if you go in for that sort of thing.

Solemn, Solemn.

Mr. Michel has set his face dead against laughter. "Sixth Finger in a Five Finger Glove" is solemn, solemn, all the way. The setting is a swap shop in a small town. Sometimes the townspeople come in to swap things, as when the town madam comes in to swap a strawberry shortcake for a repair job on her electric toaster. She asks our hero if he prefers sponge cake or biscuit with his strawberries. He says he leans toward biscuit dough. Eons later she brings in a chocolate cake. He says it is the best biscuit dough he has ever set tooth into. You see what playwright Michel is doing, don't you? He is trying to get the audience's mind off his text. He can't be dismissed, therefore, as a playwright entirely without mercy.

As the evening creeps stealthily along, it is revealed that the swap shop proprietor actually owns the entire town, every lock, stock, and barrel of it. There is consternation among the people. Greed, fear and malice rage unchecked. Lifelong friends are lost in the twinkling of an eye. Well, perhaps not quite that fast. Actually it takes hours. The townspeople retaliate. They try to get our hero declared insane. In its climatic passages Mr. Michel's drama becomes a "Mr. Deeds Doesn't Go To Town."

Not Such a Bad World.

In the end, the swap shop impresario is declared every bit as sane as you or I, and I resent this conclusion, deeply.

Last night, as the jaded first-nighters were propelling themselves out of the theater with joyous salutes to the happier world outside, cries of "This was ghastly, but it's no 'Grandma's Diary'!" were heard on every side.

I am getting just a little tired of the unparalleled smugness of the survivors of "Grandma's Diary." Everywhere I go, it seems, people say, "You may think you've been through a lot, but did you happen to see a little number called 'Grandma's. . . ."

No I didn't, and I don't want to hear about it.

Of the fairly numerous company trapped in "Six Fingers in Search of a Mitten," or whatever the blame thing is called, only a young lady named Salome Jens scores an approximate triumph. At one point Miss Jens is called upon to register her dissatisfaction with the play's internal wrangling by standing close to the footlights and screaming at the top of her lungs. She expressed a thought lying too deep for words, and gave utterance for us all.

DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

October 9, 1956

'Sixth Finger' Perfect No-Hitter: No Script, All Errors and No Run

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Well, yesterday was quite a day. In the afternoon Don Larsen pitches the perfect no-hitter at Yankee Stadium. In the evening a playwright named Scott Michel duplicates this heroic feat at the Longacre Theatre.

Michel had a thing going called "Sixth Finger in a Five Finger Glove." He was in command of the situation from the rise of the curtain, and he was supported every minute of the play by a smooth-working team which included 15 actors and 1 director. One of the actors was named Campanella.

Great Teamwork

This slick outfit never let a member of the opposing-team—the audience—get near first base as it whammed over a comic plot about a squeaky-voiced, gadget-crazy, pure-hearted young man who discovers that he owns the entire town he lives in. Like the talking horse in an old Marc Connelly fantasy, this Galahad strikes terror in the bosoms of the corrupt, who number everybody else in town except the madam of the local H-house. In playwriting it is a ground rule that all madams are kind, generous, honest and good cooks.

Jimmie Komack played the hero for all the part was worth. All the other actors played their parts for all they were worth. And playwright Scott Michel never let his teammates down. He was in there pitching all the time, throwing cliches, innuendoes and gags and seldom resorting to a changeup.

Yep, yesterday was quite a day, what with one thing and the other. By the end of the evening I was exhausted.

Daily Mirror

October 9, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

All 'Five Fingers' Are Pointing Down

• 'Six Fingers in a Five Finger Glove': no hit, many errors, no run.

Monday was a great day for no-hitters. Don Larsen tossed a perfect one for the Yanks in the afternoon. No hits, no runs, no walks, no errors. And Scott Michel came through with a dilly for Gertrude Caplin and Thelma Fingar in the evening.

Called "Sixth Finger in a Five Finger Glove," it's no hit, there'll be no run, it's packed with errors and plenty of first-nighters walked right out of the Longacre Theatre. Both Larsen and Michel were bearing down all the way. But Don was in top form, while Scott's curve hung up there and his fast one had no zip on it.

* * *

WE LIKE THAT odd title. It's real southpaw. And the idea is wacky, too, in an intriguing sort of way. But Michel had no control over it. It darted wildly around Paul Morrison's scenic diamond. It made some of us old-timers wish we were sitting behind that w.k. screen, put up to protect customers from erratic pitches.

Michel is concerned with an amiable small-town schnook, who runs a swap shop. He also talks to departed relatives, whose pictures hang on his living room walls. Most of the townies, with the exception of a tight-fisted banker, like and trust the kid. Until they discover that he's really the legal owner of their property.

Then greed rears its ugly head. They call in a couple of big-time psychiatrists to have the likeable heir committed. In self-defense, of course. Naturally, these highdomes go for the lad in a big way, but insist that he's the sixth finger in a five finger glove. Fascinating, but incapable of administering a township.

BUT LET'S GET to the crux. His defecting pals rally to him in the clutch. And he, being a swell little guy, repays them with the wisdom of a Solomon. Order, good-will and sensible solutions again prevail in Holly Cove. The point of the parable is admirable. It was the execution that mowed us down.

Under John Holden's direction, members of the large cast spent much of the evening downing copious doses of Napoleon brandy. Under the influence of this powerful pain killer, they put their hearts into projecting Michel's cliches across the footlights. Unfortunately, it was another story for the sober citizens out front. We just had to grin or growl, and bear it.

Citations for outstanding bravery under fire must go to Jimmie Komack, Bill Zuckert, Gladys Holland, Samuel Gray, Frank Campanella, Paul Huber, Charles Mendick, Bruce Evans, Salome Jens, Conrad Bain, Charles Campbell and Leopold Badia. Salome Jens—yep, that's right—is something of an anatomical miracle. If you can believe everything you see. A pulchritudinous female Janus, blessed with eye-popping facades, front and back.

Now, the moral of it all is: watch your step when you enter a shop. Beware of one that specializes in five fingered gloves for normal people, but whose clerks examine your digits for an extra one. Currently, there is such a curious emporium tenanting the Longacre Theatre premises.

The New York Times

October 9, 1956

Scott Michel's 'Sixth Finger' All Thumbs

By BROOKS ATKINSON

VERY likely the author of "Sixth Finger in a Five-Finger Glove," which opened at the Longacre last evening, has a heart of gold.

He is Scott Michel, author of "Angels Kiss Me," which played two performances in 1951. His current drama seems to be a morality play, based on the teaching that the love of money is the root of all evil. The sixth finger in a five-finger glove is a young man so pure in heart and so uninterested in money that he is superfluous in a materialistic civilization like our own.

But Mr. Michel is all thumbs as a playwright. "Sixth Finger in a Five-Finger Glove" is stupifyingly naïve as a piece of writing for the stage, and the performance is a shambles. In happier days, Jimmie Komack, who shuffles through the leading role, sang "You've Gotta Have Heart" in "Damn Yankees."

You've got to have even more than that if you want to write for the theatre. You've got to have talent.